

- Legislation Now Goes to White House -

- Hall-Clinton Provisions Likely to Become Law - Washington, DC – U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-NY19) hailed the Senate's approval of a comprehensive veterans benefit bill which included his legislation to overhaul the VA's disability claims bureaucracy. The legislation has already passed the House and is now on its way to the White House to receive the President's signature before becoming law. Congressman Hall crafted the Disability Claims Modernization Act (H.R. 5892) and pushed it through the House. U.S. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) introduced companion legislation in the Senate and helped secure its Senate passage.

"This legislation comprehensively modernizes the Veterans Benefits Administration and makes it more accountable," said Hall, Chairman of the House Veterans Subcommittee on Disability Assistance. "This bill will help the VA become a 21st century, world-class entity that fulfills its purpose of serving our veterans, their families, and survivors. Senator Clinton and I have been fighting tirelessly to get this legislation past both House of Congress and signed into law this year. America's disabled veterans cannot afford to wait a moment longer."

"I am pleased that the Senate passed this important legislation that streamlines the VA benefits system," said Senator Clinton. "With our active duty military deploying more frequently, and with our increased dependence on our Guard and Reserve, it is our duty to ensure that they receive the benefits they have earned when they return home. Improving VA procedures so that claims can be processed and benefits delivered quickly, fairly and accurately for our veterans, their families and their survivors is the least we can do for our nation's heroes."

"With the passage and enactment of this historic piece of legislation, veterans caught in the disability claims nightmare will begin to see common sense solutions applied to this decade's old dilemma," stated Michael Tokarz, National Legislative Council for the American Legion. "The American Legion is impressed with the performance of Congressman Hall in his ability to craft and move this Act through Congress in a bipartisan manner in a highly volatile election year. Good intentions and words of support for veterans are numerous in Washington. True results that will make a real difference in people's lives stand out. With two consecutive years of budgets that exceeded expectations and now the passage of the Disability Claims Modernization Act of 2008, Congressman Hall's solid results for the veterans of this country are undisputed."

The Disability Claims Modernization Act would make several sweeping changes to the way the VA processes disability claims so that injured veterans can get the benefits they are owed easier. A veteran's disability claim first has to be approved before a veteran may receive a monthly pension and expanded access to VA health care. Currently, disabled veterans suffering from combat wounds are faced with an adversarial claims processing system as well as an average six-month wait before receiving assistance. Many veterans or their surviving spouses or families are forced to wait for years, and in some cases decades, for the VA to accept their disability pension claims.

"IAVA is thrilled to see such an important piece of veterans' legislation pass the House and Senate," said Paul Rieckhoff, Executive Director of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA). "Now, desperately needed improvements will be made to ensure that our newest

generation of veterans have access to an efficient and effective compensation system that is reflective of 21st century standards and technology. I want to thank Senator Clinton and Congressman Hall for their leadership on this topic and continued commitment to veterans issues."

Clinton and Hall's legislation passed as part of a comprehensive Senate veterans' omnibus bill. Because the Senate more commonly uses the vehicle of larger, omnibus bills to pass legislation through its chamber, all of the provisions of Congressman Hall's Veterans Disability Benefits Claims Modernization Act of 2008 (HR 5892) were rolled into S. 3023, the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act.

"This legislation truly came as the result of the tireless work of veterans and their families to finally receive the treatment and benefits they deserve," said Hall. "Over the past two years, hundreds of veterans have contacted my office seeking help with their long-overdue claims. They told stories of waiting months and years to receive the benefits they earned by their selfless sacrifice. Instead of promptly being granted what they were owed, they were given the run around by a Veterans Administration plagued by archaic processing systems and a lack of accountability."

Over the last year, Hall chaired a series of hearings by his subcommittee in Washington, DC, and a field hearing last October in New Windsor about the claims backlog. With the information obtained during these hearings and from meetings with countless veterans, Hall wrote the Veterans Disability Benefits Claims Modernization Act. The House originally passed Hall's bill unanimously by a vote of 429-0 on July 30.

"These brave men and women have selflessly sacrificed in defense of our nation, and they should not be forced to wade through an outmoded system in order to receive the benefits befitting their service. I thank Congressman Hall for his leadership on this issue, and I will continue to do all I can to provide our veterans with a system that works for them, not against them," said Senator Clinton.

The White House Domestic Policy Office expressed their interest in the bill as "good government." Additionally, all the national veterans' organizations supported the legislation, including the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), AMVETS, National Veterans Legal Service Program, National Organization of Veterans Advocates, Vietnam Veterans of America, and the National Association for Uniformed Services, The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA), among others.

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